



June 9, 2011

Dear Friends of Kalamazoo,

It is from the bottom of my heart that I relay my thanks to Kalamazoo Public Library and the Kalamazoo Center for Social Justice for helping to coordinate Kalamazoo's recent reading of "Strength in What Remains." The invitation you sent us to hear about Village Health Works in Burundi and the warm welcome you offered us last month made us feel at home.

It is critical that communities around the world come together to support those that have been forgotten. This, I believe, is how we can measure world progress. From Kigutu to Kalamazoo, we all have a role to play in making the world a place of peace, health and hope. This is why we created Village Health Works. Our Village Health Works (VHW) project in rural Burundi is many years overdue and is in the perfect place for everyone who truly wants to make a difference in the world. When I think of the unspeakable misery in that country so badly forgotten and still off the map, I always wonder: what have the poor Burundians done wrong to deserve such kind of punishment? But that misery also can be looked at in another way: as a test of morality for those who sit idly by watching what happens and choosing to do nothing about it.

In the 21st century, letting some of our world citizens lag centuries behind is a serious challenge to social justice and a threat to human progress as well as global peace.

Although there is no shortage of woes in Burundi, there is no shortage of opportunities either. There is always a reason for keeping hope alive when I look at how VHW has brought so much joy and hope to the lives of our community members in such a short time and despite the meager resources and other challenges we have faced.

The mission of Village Health Works is to become a center of excellence for healing and teaching for our world so that existing conditions that have dehumanized Burundi for so long can shift into ones that favor life. There is no question in my head that this mission will be fully accomplished. All it takes is a community of compassionate people who, arms linked, get together to understand the world as it truly is.

When one does good after seeing with an open heart and mind what we eyewitness and deal with on a daily basis in Burundi, it is a humane act, more about what makes us all human than being generous.



You have clearly recognized that fact, and I trust that the event you organized in May 2011 to hear more about our work was the first step in an important collaboration between your Kalamazoo community and our growing organization. So, whatever you do, keep us in mind and let's make a difference together.

With many thanks,

Deogratias Niyizonkiza, Founder, Village Health Works.

P.S. Please continue to follow our work by visiting us at www.villagehealthworks.org.